

*ORSAM MINUTES OF THE MEETING,
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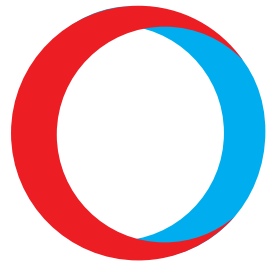
MEETING HELD ON CURRENT ISSUES IN THE MIDDLE EAST, WITH THE OFFICIALS OF MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF IRAN, IN ORSAM, ON FEBRUARY 7TH 2012

ORTADOĞU'DAKİ GÜNCEL MESELELER ÜZERİNE
İRAN DIŞIŞLERİ BAKANLIĞI
YETKİLİLERİYLE 7 ŞUBAT 2012'DE
ORSAM'DA YAPILAN TOPLANTI

الاجتماع المعقود في (أورسام) مع مسؤولي وزارة الخارجية
الایرانية في السابع من شباط / فبراير ٢٠١٢
حول الاحداث الجارية في الشرق الأوسط

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية





ORSAM

MINUTES OF
THE MEETING

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

History

In Turkey, the shortage of research on the Middle East grew more conspicuous than ever during the early 90's. Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) was established in January 1, 2009 in order to provide relevant information to the general public and to the foreign policy community. The institute underwent an intensive structuring process, beginning to concentrate exclusively on Middle Eastern affairs.

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It is certain that the Middle East harbors a variety of interconnected problems. However, neither the Middle East nor its people ought to be stigmatized by images with negative connotations. Given the strength of their populations, Middle Eastern states possess the potential to activate their inner dynamics in order to begin peaceful mobilizations for development. Respect for people's willingness to live together, respect for the sovereign right of states and respect for basic human rights and individual freedoms are the prerequisites for assuring peace and tranquility, both domestically and internationally. In this context, Turkey must continue to make constructive contributions to the establishment of regional stability and prosperity in its vicinity.

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* ORSAM is a member of the The Middle East Studies Association (MESA).



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Jalal NAMINI:

This kind of exchange is also important. You know, the IPIS is our study center, Institute of Political and International Studies. Mtr Kalantari is the Director of the Center for Asia&Pacific Studies, which includes Turkey as well. Dr. Najafi is also a scholar in the field of non proliferation and disarmament. We are a long time friend of Turkey. Mr. Kanbolat, how do you see the developments in our neighborhood?

Is it only the Syrian internal situation which has changed? You can see the same change in other regional countries in the Middle East such as Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan,

Morocco. How do you see the developments?

It is not the case. Even the Sunnis in Bahrain are not happy with the ruling system. People in the streets are not just the Shia. It seems they are Shia because many people are Shia. But among them you can find a lot of Sunnis as well. This is the way that the ruling family wants to express. If you are in the streets of Manama or in the villages of Bahrain, the Shia and the Sunni are rising up against the Bahraini rulers.

What about the case in Yemen, Jordan and the other countries?

Mr. Mustafa DOLATYAR:

Thank you for your explanations. I think that the developments in Syria have many dimensions. One is that you mentioned, innocents civilian people demonstrating against the regime and the clash between them. This is one aspect. But there are



some other dimensions. One dimension is the role of gangs there. There are some armed gangs. You cannot separate them from the other people. They have a role in these developments. Mostly the clash between them and the government leads to developments towards killing of so many people. The other dimension is that there are foreign powers which are active in the developments there. We can see Europe and the United States in one side and Russia and China on the other side. They have their own interests in Syria. They try to impact the developments in Syria in their own interests. Also there is the Israeli factor. Syria is known as the country, which supports the groups that are active in Israel and the region. Although Syria herself didn't go to a serious war to regain the Golan Heights but they are active supporters of groups against Israel. Israel also has some interest in the developments there. Turkey has own interests there. Iraq has their own policy. Jordan has its own view and Lebanon, these are neighboring countries, which have their own interests and their own policies. These views don't match each other. Now the developments in Syria, even if lead towards the toppling of the Bashar regime, but I see the main problem will start from the day that the withdrawal of Bashar from power in Syria. That is because there are so many factors affecting the developments in Syria, which cannot come together and make one decision. Then everyone will see its own interests and it will be the origin of instability there which will harm the stability of the region like Iraq. And also the demographic structure of the people of

Syria will help them trigger this kind of instability. From the religious point of view also they can benefit from and trigger this kind of instability in the region. What will be the impact of these happening to the region? It is very important, it is a complicated story. It has many dimensions but as I see when I listen to His Excellency Erdogan, his speech to his party group, I see an emotional approach to the one side of the problem. It cannot lead us to a salvation of the problems there in a proper way. It is aa complicated story. My question is that whether or not you will talk on the other aspects of the developments too? Because you explained now only the people, which are killed by the government in a savage way and the brutality there and so on. I think it is not the only matter there. There are some other things that the government in the region must think about them too.

Mr. JALAL NAMINI:

Bashar Assad is one person. You are talking about a specific person. Bashar Assad has a strong party, Baath party. You and we both know what its background is. We have been dealing with the Baath party in Iraq for eight years during the war. It is not just one person, it is the system. If this system collapses, definitely the Balkanization of Syria will take place. This is the most likely scenario and we see that there are many quarters both in the region and beyond the region, which have been looking for such a situation in Syria for years. If Balkanization happens in Syria much more civilians will be killed. You have witnessed the situation in the Balkans. We have wit-

nessed the situation in Afghanistan. This is very new experience. Foreign elements have proved. They are not ashamed to say it again; they are for disintegration of any country in the region, which they dislike. They dislike Assad, because it has been harbor for muqawama. This is very clear that the Americans, Europeans are ready to do what is necessary to safeguard the Zionist regime's security. It is very clear for everyone that Syria, with all the defects and shortcomings, it has been the strongest front in support of the muqawama. If it happens to collapse, the first victim will be Turkey as well. You are the immediate neighbors.

As it has been said the demography of Syria is clear. Christians, Alawites, Druze, Kurds, Arabs, Sunnis, so many elements. The speculation is there. It joins with the internal situation in Iraq. The first front of this destabilization is Turkey. Sometimes I wonder how Turkey is coming to this conclusion to destroy its masterpiece in its foreign policy. Regarding its relations with Syria during this last decade was a great job. Your borders became borders of peace. I was in Hatay last year that the governor Hatay was talking about great achievements that Turkey was doing with Syria in all aspects of life. He said "This border was filled with soldiers and barbed wires, there were no transit of people and goods, and we were not feeling secure at that time, but now there is no soldier, no barbed wire and people are coming and going. Business and trade have doubled up every year." It was really as masterpiece in foreign policy and everybody was admiring Turkey's

new government to be able to do such a great job. Suddenly you destroyed all of it. It was Turkey's hasty acting in the playground of the Westerners, built for decades. As you said, they have been destabilizing Syria; therefore they have been trying to remove Assad and his family from over for decades. They took the opportunity to do that. They intervened by arming the opposition and the opposition was not, in Syria, as visionary as wise as it was in Egypt. In Egypt, there was some possibility for this kind of armed conflict. But the Muslim Brotherhood and others in Egypt are very wise. They did their job very good. Here you have the host of the so-called opposition; you know how fragmented they are. There is not a nationwide opposition against Assad and the ruling party. There are elements beyond the region who articulate this so-called opposition. The big mistake was that they were very hasty in arming this opposition. Turkey has been dealing with armed opposition for decades. Then some armed gangs come into play in the civilian area. They hide themselves among them and the government has no choice to attack them. And when they attack them definitely civilians will be harmed. They say "Ok this government is so brutal, bombing its civilian people" and so on. The point is that there is the playground of Westerners, Americans, and Europeans, built for Syria. They call everybody to come and play within it. We have to be careful to have our own regional playground. Turkey is the immediate neighbor of Syria. By the way it is not just the Syrian ruling system, which has so many shortcomings that you mentioned. Poverty, gap

between poor and wealthy, and all issues that you raised can be applied to all countries in the region, from the tiniest one, which is Bahrain, to the biggest one, which is Saudi Arabia. All of them have the same problem. But why Syria has been selected to deal in such a way? We have to think about the aftermath. Suppose Assad is over tomorrow. What will happen? What will happen to Turkey? What will happen to Iraq and the rest of the region? What will happen to muqawama? Israel will definitely be more than happy to see Assad out of power, because instability in the region will benefit the Zionist State. Some people say that Assad system has always been very careful not to do harm to the Israeli regime. But this is not a good justification. Yes, Assad and the Syrian government have not been attacking Israel because of their own interest. And at the same time they have been the only safe haven for muqawama. Definitely it is a dream for the Israelis to see Assad and his party out of power. Definitely they will internal conflicts within Syria after Assad to make it a sort of Afghanistan in this neighborhood. They say ok, there is no reasonable party to talk to and justify whatever they do in the future. They need time. They desperately need time because of the situation in Egypt. It is not a good situation for Israelis. Definitely they do not want such things happen in Syria. They would prevent such things to happen in Syria. So the Balkanization of Syria is the best choice for them and the worst choice for Turkey and the rest of the countries in the region.

Mr. Jalal KALANTARI:

You see the point is there. The problem with Syria is the ambiguities associated with the case of Syria. We would be more than happy if our Turkey brothers, government, study centers, universities, if they have a clear cut idea about the future of Syria. If we had any clear cut ideas, it would be better to exchange ideas. You said if Turkey gives guarantees that tomorrow of Syria will be the same as Assad to Israel, it means that you control the tomorrow of Syria. If that is the case we are really happy to hear. You see the point for us about Syria is the Americans are against Syrians, the Europeans are against Syrians. The Israelis are against Syrians. Syria has two sets of dimensions: internally, which I would agree with you the defects above the ongoing problems are going on. Nobody supports killing of innocent peoples, whether it is in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Yemen or in the streets of Syria. It is also very unfortunate that Turkey just stick to the problem of Syria, although it is in its national interest. This is quite understandable. It is also understandable that, although you are concerned about killing in the streets of Syrian different cities, your concern is about your national interests. In the previous meeting that we had with you again and in the current meeting, we think that first of all there should be a regional solution for the questions of Syria. We shouldn't let the overseas actors and their projects. I think it is also on the contrary to the principles of your current foreign policy that you are also a part of the international solution. International solution means

the solution that the Americans are projecting towards Syria. International solution will mean what the US and the Western countries are projecting at us. We think that this is not going to be on the side of the people in Syria. To be very frank to you as our neighbors, brothers and sisters, there is much room for collaboration between Iran and Turkey on the scene of Syria, especially taking into account the current circumstances. Naturally some other international players have come forward in order to be an active player on the scene of Syria, that is China and Russia. Maybe much to the contrary to the expectations that the Chinese and the Russians are looking forward. This has created good opportunities for Iran and Turkey to boost a sort of regional solutions. Although we have a very good meetings in Foreign Affairs also, really on the side of Iranian Foreign Office and Foreign Office of Turkey. And on the side of the study centers of the two countries we should discuss the issues. We think that internally reform in Syria should be given a further chance. We think that we have the potential to talk to Bashar Assad and convince him for further reforms. Turkey has the potentials to talk to the opponents. You see you shouldn't go for the best scenario and the worst circumstance. I think we should give a chance to a sort of dialogue between regional countries, a coordination between Iran and Turkey first, maybe Egypt also could come forward, and then convincing Assad and opponents to sit together and discuss. I think the GCC is not a good forum that Turkey is trying to act jointly with. This is my personal view. Who

are the components of the GCC? The components of the GCC is Saudi Arabia. The problems that you said about the problems of the Syrian society are the same as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and even the United States of America. They do not join the capacity to solve the problem in Syria. We have certain doubts about their intentions. Their intentions are that they take into account maybe Iran and Syria, their hidden relationship with the State of Israel. Let me sum up my words by saying that. I think there is room for internal communication inside Syria. There is a room for a sincere interaction between Iran and Turkey. Mr. Namini can certify that. We have stated officially to sit together and discuss issues with Turkey in order to see what will be the probable solution in all Syria. Maybe in that part we have not been able to closely interact with Turkey but now there is a room for that. I think the Russians could help, the Chinese also could help. But the solution should be homegrown solution, a regional homegrown solution for Syria. This is something we are ready for.

Mr. Reza NAJAFI:

It is not my expertise, but I followed the discussion very carefully. It reminds me the claims and allegations before the Iraq War, before 2003. The expectations of the US and the others were that when they enter Iraq and topple Saddam, then they could build a beautiful country with democracy and everybody will be freely together. But you see after ten years the more and more people are getting killed and still there is no stability. So I guess

all countries in the region should be very careful not to repeat the history. It is not in the benefit of Turkey, Iran, or any other country in the region.

Mr. Mustafa DOLATYAR:

I think Turkey has an advantage on the other hand. Turkey has good relations with opposition groups, and we have good relations with Beshar Esad. If we come together and run initiatives, we can bring these two groups to a table to discuss and find solutions. I see that the main way for solving these problems is that to have compromise inside Syria within in the government and opponent group. Iran and Turkey can run initiative; they can complete each other in this field. This is important I think. I am director of the department dealing with Turkey in Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran. We hinted several times Turkish side in this matter to see what will be the Turkish approach, we still wait to see a positive approach to arrange this kind of session between two sides. Turkey can have this kind of session, but it means to have something in advance to soften the atmosphere between the Syrian regime and also its opponent. But I don't believe that the solute administration will be able to topple Beshar Esad, because they also have some groups who support Beshar Esad inside Syria although the majority is against him, he can rely on minority supporting him and run his government but with tensions. But I don't believe that democracy can be achieved in Syria like this, because democracy is not a project but a process. In turkey we see that after 78 years now you can say that we will

not have military coup, now you can say, you could not say this for example five years ago. You are working on this matter more than 80 years. Also in Syria, if you want democracy in Syria; you have to see that democracy is not a project. You cannot bring it in one day or in short period of time. And also United States and Western countries are not pro-democracy in the region. Their main goal in the region is to security of Israel and arrange all the other things in this direction. If we can come together and encourage the sides to come together to solve their problems, I believe that it will be benefit of both sides, benefit of region and Syrians also. If there is any kind of transition of power in Syria, it only can be done trough this way.

Mr. Jalal NAMINI:

It is pleasure to see you. Anyway today I told our friends in the Ministry that we do not have any doubt about the good wishes of Turkey, as it comes to its neighbors to Syria and Iran. But the problems are the other elements active inside Syria. Some people are looking for revenge from Esad for their personal interests; some are the interests to destabilize the Syria. American and western countries are looking for their own interests, not looking for democracy. Because as you know they are always the strongest supporter of the patriarch regimes in the region, so they never look for democracy, they always look their own interest. If one day, their interest requires supporting a dictator in a country like Saddam Hussein, they do that. If their interest indicates to impose the family rule as in the Persian Gulf area, they do that.

And at the end of they are not embraced of that, because they said that because these are for their national interests. So they have their own game in the region and inside Syria. But the interests of Turkey, Iran, Palestine and whole people in the region necessitate being very careful not to play in the field of these countries. We have ability and intellectual capacity and other elements to sit and find solutions within the region. Absolutely there are some fighter actors that want to come to work, as I heard France announced that they lost confidence Beshar Esad. If it is the case, we will lose full confidence to Beshar

Esad, Esad lose his confidence to Turkey, and not come together anymore. We need to build confidence to come together. There have been more dimensions of the situation in Syria as we mentioned before, in so we have to come together and solve the issues in behalf of the Syrian people and people in the region. Yes I know it is a bit late, but better than not do anything. Today we visit intellectual and academicians beside officials to create a core group to facilitate a group. I hope that we can settle this matter in a peaceful manner in the first place to the interests of Syrians and then for the people of the region.

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